

Deadly New Challenges in the Fight Against TB



WHO/TBP/Falisse

Tuberculosis causes over a third of all fatalities among HIV-positive people, including these patients in a women's ward in Thailand. When TB is not treated properly, it can spread quickly among other HIV-positive patients, healthworkers, and hospital visitors.

During the last 10 years, a new system of treating tuberculosis (TB) supported by USAID saved more than 2.5 million lives and prevented 100 to 150 million new cases. The system—Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS)—requires healthworkers to ensure that patients take a full four-month course of anti-TB drugs.

Ten years after the World Health Organization declared the disease a global emergency in March 1993, more than 10 million TB patients have been treated through DOTS.

Nevertheless, between now and the year 2020, it is estimated that nearly 1 billion people will be newly infected, 200 million will get the disease, and 70 million will die of TB.

Despite the effectiveness of DOTS, TB has spread because it attacks HIV/AIDS patients. There are also new virulent strains of TB that are resistant to previously effective drugs. This is, in part, because patients stopped taking medication when symptoms disappeared, allowing these new strains to survive treatment.

“People with HIV are particularly vulnerable to infection because their depressed immune systems offer no protection,” said Dr. E. Anne Peterson, MD, Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for Global Health. “It is often the infection which leads to, or contributes to, the death of HIV-positive patients.”

Half of HIV-positive people are infected with TB. It kills 30 percent of AIDS victims in Africa and Asia.

USAID is supporting the World Health Organization's ProTEST Initiative to assist patients struggling with TB and HIV infections with counseling and testing. Pilot project sites in South Africa, Malawi, and Zambia have served more than 70,000 patients over the past four years.

Tuberculosis kills more people than any other infectious agent in the world. Of the estimated 2 billion people infected, 8 million develop active TB each year and 2 million die.

The developing world has 95 percent of the world's cases and 98 percent of TB deaths.

The Agency has played an important role in helping develop global initiatives—such as the Global Partnership to Stop TB and the Global TB Drug Facility—to provide rapidly and efficiently the inexpensive anti-TB drugs essential to countries in need.

In 2002, the Agency worked in 35 countries, committing \$65 million to the international fight against TB. In addition, the U.S. government made a substantial contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. ★

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